

RECOGNIZING THE UNITED STATES AIR FORCE

Mr. GARDNER. Madam President, I rise to recognize the U.S. Air Force on the occasion of its 69th birthday.

On September 18, 1947, President Truman signed the National Security Act, which established the U.S. Air Force as an independent service equal to the U.S. Army and U.S. Navy. The mission of the U.S. Air Force is to fly, fight, and win in airspace and cyberspace, and Colorado is proud to call itself home to units that play a vital role in executing all aspects of the Air Force mission.

Although it is the youngest of the armed services, the Air Force has accomplished a tremendous amount—a tremendous amount—in those 69 years. With a combined force strength of more than 660,000 Active, Reserve, National Guard, and civilian personnel within the U.S. Air Force, it is a force to be reckoned with. The U.S. Air Force's ability to maintain air superiority is evidenced by the fact that the last time an American ground troop was killed by ordnance delivered from an enemy aircraft was in 1953.

On any given day, there are more than 21,000 Air Force personnel deployed to 179 worldwide locations, 16,000 airmen deployed to the CENTCOM area of operations, and more than 1,000 airmen working directly with partner nations. While American airmen serve all over the world, there are thousands of airmen in my State of Colorado protecting our Nation's interests.

Colorado is home to five major Air Force installations that include Buckley Air Force Base, Schriever Air Force Base, Peterson Air Force Base, Cheyenne Mountain Air Force Station, and the United States Air Force Academy.

Buckley Air Force Base is home to the 460th Space Wing and has air operations, space-based missile warning capabilities, space surveillance operations, space communications operations, and support functions. If North Korea, Iran, or any adversary fires a missile at the U.S. homeland, Buckley would be the first to see it. Buckley is also one of 18 bases nationwide being considered by the Air Force to host the next-generation F-35 jet, and it is my firm belief it fully merits that designation as well.

Peterson Air Force Base, named after 1st Lt. Edward J. Peterson, a Colorado native, has been in operation since 1926. Over its 90-plus years, Peterson Air Force Base has served a variety of operational and training missions and is currently home to the 21st Space Wing and Air Force Space Command as well. Peterson is also home to the U.S. Northern Command—NORTHCOM—and the North American Aerospace Defense Command, or NORAD. NORAD-NORTHCOM is responsible for protecting the U.S. homeland from the myriad of threats we face in today's complex global security environment. On a day like today, when we reflect on what happened in Minnesota, when we

reflect on what happened in New Jersey, and when we reflect on what happened in New York, we know that efforts to protect our homeland are critically important.

In a recent letter to the President, several colleagues and I expressed grave concerns about the rapid advancement of North Korea's nuclear ballistic missile program. That regime represents a grave threat to global peace and stability and is a direct threat to the U.S. homeland—and that is what our bases in Colorado are responsible for. While we in Congress urge the President to take actions to counter the North Korean threat, the American people rely on the hard-working men and women at NORAD-NORTHCOM to protect us from this rogue regime.

Just down the road from Peterson Air Force Base is Schriever Air Force Base, which is home to the 50th Space Wing of the Air Force Space Command. Schriever provides command and control for over 170 Department of Defense warning, navigational, and communications satellites. The global positioning satellite, or GPS, is operated by the 2nd Space Operations Squadron at Schriever. If you successfully use your Google Maps today, it is because of the good work by the satellite operators at Schriever.

Schriever is home to the Joint Interagency Space Operations Center, or JICSpOC. Established in 2015, the JICSpOC consolidates efforts between the DOD, U.S. Strategic Command, and the intelligence community to create unity of effort and facilitate U.S. information-sharing across the national security space enterprise. JICSpOC will enhance U.S. space operations, contribute to operational command and control within the Department of Defense, and improve the Nation's ability to protect and defend critical infrastructure in an increasingly contested space environment.

Since 1966, Cheyenne Mountain Air Force, stationed in Colorado Springs, has been a synergistic hub for tracking security threats worldwide and serves as an essential component to the defense of North America and global security. Cheyenne Mountain is an engineering marvel that provides an electromagnetic pulse-hardened facility to protect our Nation's most vital interests. Many of the people around the country may know Cheyenne Mountain Air Force Station as the site of Matthew Broderick in the movie "WarGames."

Last but not least of the major Air Force installations in Colorado is the U.S. Air Force Academy. Since the 1955 swearing-in of its first class of cadets, the Air Force Academy has been developing leaders of character to lead the world's best Air Force. The Air Force Academy educates, trains, and inspires men and women to become officers of character, motivated to lead the U.S. Air Force in service to our Nation.

In addition to celebrating the Air Force's 69th birthday, I would also like

to recognize that this year, 2016, is the 40th anniversary of women cadets enrolling in the U.S. Air Force Academy. Just as the Air Force leads the way as the preeminent global air power, the Air Force Academy has been leading the way with the integration of women cadets into the Cadet Wing.

In 1972, the Air Force Academy issued Operational Plan 36-72, which laid the groundwork for the arrival of its first 156 female cadets in the summer of 1976. In the proceeding 40 years, women cadets and graduates have made extraordinary contributions to both the academy and to the Air Force. These contributions are exemplified by women such as Michelle Johnson, who in 1980 became the first woman cadet wing commander, which is the highest ranking cadet in the academy, and then in 1981 she became the first woman cadet to become a Rhodes scholar. In 2013, Lt. Gen. Michelle Johnson became the first female superintendent of any military service academy when she became the superintendent of the U.S. Air Force Academy. Heather Wilson was the first female veteran to serve in Congress. Lt. Gen. Susan J. Helms was the first woman graduate of the Air Force Academy to go into space. Lieutenant Roslyn Schulte became the first female graduate killed by enemy action in 2009. These women and countless others are why the State of Colorado is proud, honored, and humbled to host the U.S. Air Force Academy.

On behalf of all Coloradans and a grateful nation, I wish the U.S. Air Force a happy 69th birthday. Aim high, fly, fight, and win.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. COATS). Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Thank you, Mr. President.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Will the Senator withhold.

DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS EXPIRING AUTHORITIES ACT OF 2016

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to the consideration of H.R. 5985, which the clerk will report.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 5985) to amend title 38, United States Code, to extend certain expiring provisions of law administered by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, and for other purposes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. There will now be 30 minutes of debate equally divided in the usual form.

The Senator from Connecticut is recognized.

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Mr. President, I see my friend and colleague, the chairman of the VA Committee, here. I will happily yield to him to speak first, or I can proceed and then yield to him afterwards.

Mr. ISAKSON. I appreciate that. I yield to the Senator from Connecticut to begin.

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Mr. President, I am pleased and honored to be here today to speak in support of H.R. 5985, the Department of Veterans Affairs Expiring Authorities Act. We will vote on it shortly. I thank my colleagues for what I expect to be an overwhelmingly positive vote to affirm our commitment to the veterans of America and that neither dysfunction nor distraction of what is happening during this season of elections will prevent us from keeping the lights on in the Veterans Affairs Department.

As its name implies, this measure would maintain 27 vital ongoing programs and services that the VA provides through the next year. I commend Chairman MILLER and Ranking Member TAKANO in the House for drafting this bipartisan measure that is so important and necessary. We have worked collaboratively with them. Chairman ISAKSON and I have met with them numerous times, and it has truly been a cooperative and collaborative effort.

This legislation authorizes an increase in the existing VA caregivers program of \$10 million, going from \$724 million to \$734 million, as well as a grants program that assists homeless veterans and provides them with support services.

The bill we will vote on this evening will also give the Secretary of the VA the exact same power as the Secretary of Education has with respect to title IV in the event of a university's sudden loss of accreditation. It is critically important. As we have seen with ITT and Corinthian, for-profit colleges have abruptly closed, leaving veterans stranded. This bill will empower the VA Secretary to provisionally approve programs for use with the GI bill so that veterans may transition to another course of study. Without this provision becoming law now, veterans who attended those schools like ITT may find themselves in a similar untenable, unacceptable, unfair situation. They lose education benefits and, equally troubling, benefits for their housing and food allowance, which they so critically need.

I am pleased we can vote on this measure tonight and send it to the President's desk for his signature. But the simple, stark fact is that this bill is simply a small down payment—a small step in the direction that we must move and that the Senate must accomplish in the days that remain in this session to honor all who have served. It is just one of a series of congressional actions that are needed before we recess to ensure that for-profit schools that put their profits before

veterans' rights to an education do not hurt our veterans as their business model collapses.

The Senate should also pass the Veterans Education Relief and Reinstatement Act that Senator TILLIS of North Carolina and I have introduced. This bill is bipartisan, as is this bill, and would grant an emergency housing stipend to those students who are adversely affected by destabilizing permanent school closures. Corinthian College and, more recently, ITT give a voice and face to this staggeringly real problem for so many veterans who are the victims of the exploitation by these for-profit schools.

Our mission of ensuring that no veteran is left behind will not be completed by the vote we take this evening. It is just a down payment. I urge my colleagues to join with me in supporting H.R. 5985 and beginning and concluding the hard work of passing other bills that have been reported out of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee, with the strong bipartisan work, collaboration, and partnership among the chairman, Senator ISAKSON, and myself.

I thank Senator ISAKSON for being here this evening, and I will be honored to yield to him now.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Georgia.

Mr. ISAKSON. Mr. President, I am honored to join the ranking member, Senator BLUMENTHAL from Connecticut, on this important day.

This morning when I woke up, I began preparing for a speech I made at Oglethorpe University at 11 o'clock this morning on Constitution Day, and it reminded me of what an important September day today is.

Senator Robert Byrd, the distinguished Democrat, majority leader, and President pro tempore of the Senate for many years and who served here for many decades, amended an appropriations act on September 19, 2004, to designate today as Constitution Day. So it is a great honor for me to speak on the floor to honor our veterans on the day we honor our Constitution because, without our veterans, there would be no Constitution. Without those who fight to defend our freedom and our liberty around the world, there would be no Constitution. So it is a great day to do this.

I wish to express my agreement with exactly what Senator BLUMENTHAL said. This is a mere down payment. It is an acknowledgment. There is lots of work to be done. Critically, though, this extender bill addresses any number of programs in the VA that will expire at the end of the fiscal year unless they are extended. Most importantly are homeless programs, which are critically important, and adaptive sports programs, which are critically important as well.

So by adopting this bill, our homeless programs will stay in place and our adaptive sports programs will stay in place. As Senator BLUMENTHAL said,

should the Secretary of Education shut down an institution midterm, this provides help to that student who is a veteran to see to it that they don't lose their benefit and they can continue their education.

Again, this is a small down payment. We have other things yet to be done. Hopefully, they will be done after we come back for the lameduck session after the election. But tonight, all Members of the Senate from both parties—Republicans and Democrats—can help us make a down payment on Constitution Day to those who make our freedom and liberty possible—our veterans of the United States of America.

I urge an "aye" vote from each Member of the Senate.

I yield back the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. ISAKSON. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. ISAKSON. Mr. President, I yield back all time.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. All time is yielded back.

The bill was ordered to a third reading and was read the third time.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The bill having been read the third time, the question is, Shall the bill pass?

Mr. HATCH. Mr. President, I ask for the yeas and nays.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There appears to be a sufficient second.

The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant bill clerk called the roll.

Mr. CORNYN. The following Senators are necessarily absent: the Senator from Wisconsin (Mr. JOHNSON), the Senator from Illinois (Mr. KIRK), the Senator from Alaska (Ms. MURKOWSKI), the Senator from South Carolina (Mr. SCOTT), the Senator from Alabama (Mr. SESSIONS), and the Senator from Alaska (Mr. SULLIVAN).

Further, if present and voting, the Senator from Wisconsin (Mr. JOHNSON) would have voted "yea" and the Senator from South Carolina (Mr. SCOTT) would have voted "yea."

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from Delaware (Mr. COONS), the Senator from Virginia (Mr. Kaine), the Senator from Maryland (Ms. MIKULSKI), the Senator from Vermont (Mr. SANDERS), and the Senator from Virginia (Mr. WARNER) are necessarily absent.

I further announce that, if present and voting, the Senator from Virginia (Mr. Kaine) would vote yea.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. LANKFORD). Are there any other Senators in the Chamber desiring to vote?

The result was announced—yeas 89, nays 0, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 143 Leg.]

YEAS—89

Alexander	Ernst	Murphy
Ayotte	Feinstein	Murray
Baldwin	Fischer	Nelson
Barrasso	Flake	Paul
Bennet	Franken	Perdue
Blumenthal	Gardner	Peters
Blunt	Gillibrand	Portman
Booker	Graham	Reed
Boozman	Grassley	Reid
Boxer	Hatch	Risch
Brown	Heinrich	Roberts
Burr	Heitkamp	Rounds
Cantwell	Heller	Rubio
Capito	Hirono	Sasse
Cardin	Hoeben	Schatz
Carper	Inhofe	Schumer
Casey	Isakson	Shaheen
Cassidy	King	Shelby
Coats	Klobuchar	Stabenow
Cochran	Lankford	Tester
Collins	Leahy	Thune
Corker	Lee	Tillis
Cornyn	Manchin	Toomey
Cotton	Markey	Udall
Crapo	McCain	Vitter
Cruz	McCaskill	Warren
Daines	McConnell	Whitehouse
Donnelly	Menendez	Wicker
Durbin	Merkley	Wyden
Enzi	Moran	

NOT VOTING—11

Coons	Mikulski	Sessions
Johnson	Murkowski	Sullivan
Kaine	Sanders	Warner
Kirk	Scott	

The bill (H.R. 5985) was passed.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Wyoming.

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. BARRASSO. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate be in a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The Senator from Ohio.

Mr. BROWN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that I be permitted to speak for up to 15 minutes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

VOTING RIGHTS

Mr. BROWN. Mr. President, last year our country celebrated the 50th anniversary of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, one of the most important pieces of legislation that was passed in the 20th century. It opened the door for millions of Americans to exercise their constitutional right to vote. But this year will mark the first Presidential election in half a century without the full protections guaranteed by that landmark law. One of the worst decisions this corporate-dominated Supreme Court made was *Shelby County v. Holder*, which struck down a key part of the law, taking the teeth out of provisions that protect voters from suppression laws.

Since that misguided decision, States across the country have passed new voting restrictions that would disenfranchise hundreds of thousands of Americans. At least 17 States have passed new voting restrictions since the *Shelby County* restriction. We

know who is hurt most by these laws—African Americans, Latinos, young people, and seniors.

In North Carolina, before enacting one of these laws, the State legislature specifically asked for data on voting patterns by race. Once they had this data, they decided to eliminate or limit the voting methods used by African-American voters. Thankfully, the Fourth Circuit Court struck down this blatant attempt to disenfranchise one group of voters, writing: “The new provisions target African Americans with almost surgical precision.”

In my State of Ohio, the courts have shamefully allowed laws such as these to stay on the books. Last week we were dealt multiple blows.

First, the Supreme Court refused to hear an appeal on the Sixth Circuit’s decision ending “Golden Week”—created by a Republican legislature a decade ago—when voters can register and vote on the same day during the 1 week early-voting period. In May, Judge Watson—a George W. Bush appointee in the Southern District in Columbus—found that the laws limiting early voting and registration would disproportionately impact African Americans. Judge Watson did the right thing, but the ultraconservative Sixth Circuit ruled to overturn that ruling, ending “Golden Week.” Last week the Supreme Court nodded 4 to 4 because the Republican majority leader won’t let the Senate do its job to have hearings and confirmation on Judge Garland. The Supreme Court declined to intervene.

Then the Sixth Circuit overturned a lower court ruling that had thrown out new Ohio laws imposing stricter requirements on absentee and provisional voters. Judge Damon Keith’s dissent in this case captured what these restrictions are really all about. He notes that during the committee debate over the law, one legislator asked: “Should we really be making it easier for those people who take the bus after church on Sunday to vote?”—making it crystal clear exactly what they were targeting and whom they were targeting.

Judge Keith continues:

Democracies die behind closed doors.

Voting is the ultimate expression of self-government. Instead of making it easier for all persons, unrestrained and unfettered, to exercise this fundamental right to vote, legislators are making it harder.

States are audaciously nullifying a right for which our ancestors relentlessly fought and—in some instances—even tragically died.

I would point out that only about a decade ago, this body and the House overwhelmingly, bipartisanly renewed the Voting Rights Act that the Court struck down. Now one political party is digging in in opposition to that. It is no secret what these laws are about. State legislators have made it perfectly clear.

In 2008, African Americans voted early in person at a rate more than 20 times greater than White voters. We all remember the scenes from Cuyahoga

County, Cleveland, in 2004 when some voters waited as long as 7 hours to vote. For hourly workers, college students who work a third shift, parents who have to drop their children off at school, and many others, early voting ensures that their voices will be heard. In 2012, 10 percent of the electorate—600,000 people—voted early in my State. That is 600,000 voices that might not have been heard were it not for early voting. But some judges who dress in suits and lead very privileged lives with generous benefits from taxpayers have decided these voices aren’t worth hearing. As Judge Keith said, democracies die behind closed doors. This body refuses to hold a hearing on the nominee who would have allowed the Supreme Court to hear the appeal on the “Golden Week” issue and issue a real decision.

This body refuses to bring to the floor the bipartisan Voting Rights Advancement Act.

In 1981, when signing an extension to the Voting Rights Act, President Reagan called the right to vote “the crown jewel of American liberties.” Ronald Reagan would have seen his political party today going in exactly the opposite direction, and that is sad.

HONORING OUR ARMED FORCES

SEAMAN 1ST CLASS WILLIAM WELCH

Mr. BROWN. Mr. President, I rise to honor Seaman 1st Class William W. Welch, a native of Springfield, OH—an American hero who laid down his life for our country during the attack on Pearl Harbor.

Seaman Welch was known to his family as Billy. He enlisted in the Navy, as so many did in those days, at 17. He left during his senior year at Springfield Catholic Central High School, so determined was he to serve his country. On December 7, 1941, Welch was stationed on the USS *Oklahoma*, docked at the U.S. Naval Base at Pearl Harbor. The *Oklahoma* was the first to be hit that fateful morning by the Japanese.

Of the more than 1,300 crew aboard, 429 perished that day—a loss of life second only to the better known USS *Arizona*. The ship capsized, and Billy Welch was among the first of so many Americans to make the ultimate sacrifice for our Nation during World War II. Billy’s grieving family was dealt an additional blow when their son’s remains were not returned to them, and they were unable to give him a burial befitting his sacrifice.

It wasn’t until 1943 that the Navy was able to right the *Oklahoma* and began trying to identify the remains. By then, with the technology available in the 1940s, it was too late for most sailors. Billy and his fellow sailors were buried as “unknowns,” and they had rested in the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific in Honolulu until last year.

In 2014, Billy Welch’s nephew, Michael, contacted my office. He was